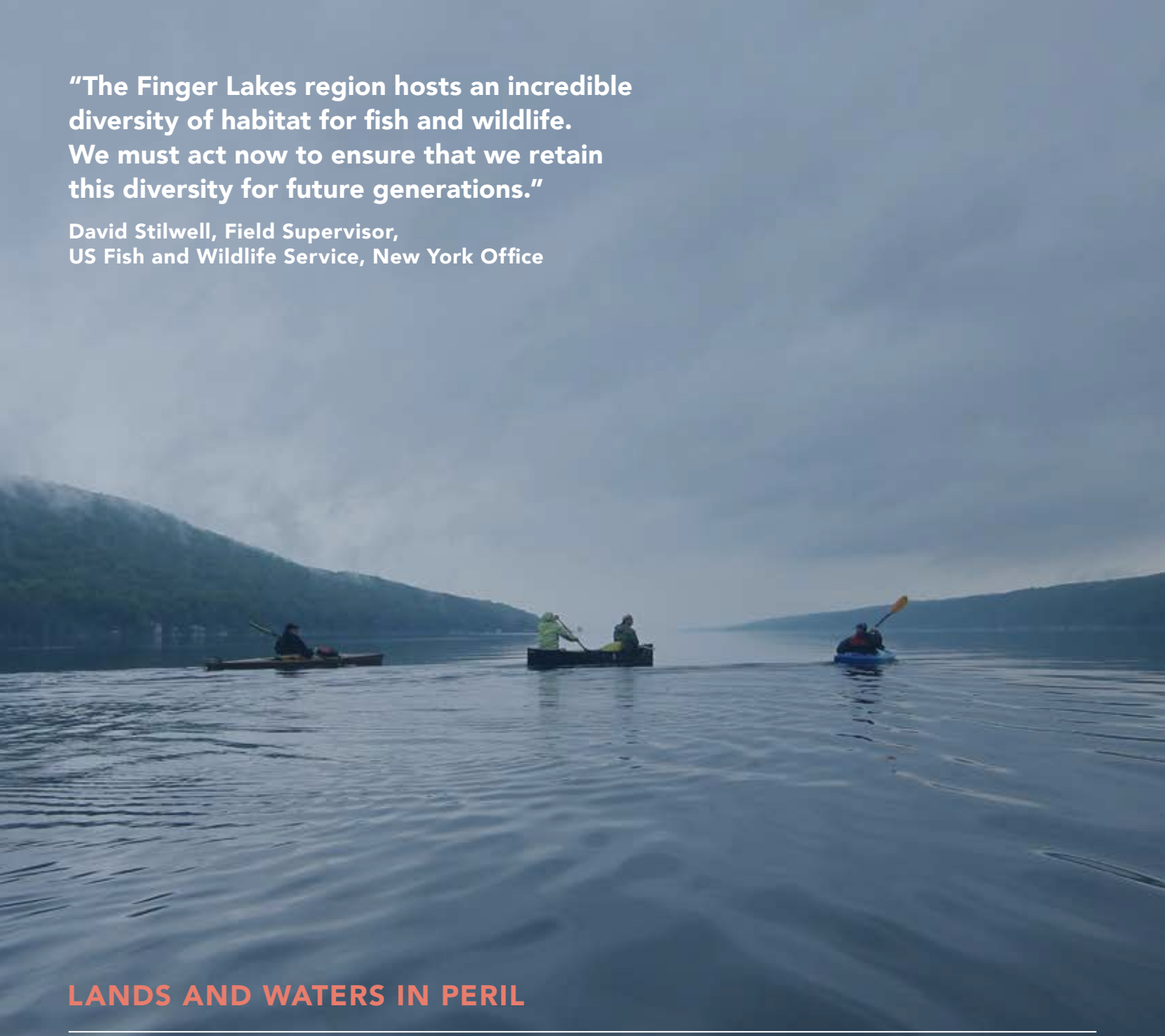
LAKES, FARMS, & FORESTS FOREVER

TEN CONSERVATION STRATEGIES FOR THE FINGER LAKES REGION

TOGETHER WE CAN SAVE THE LANDS AND WATERS THAT SUSTAIN AGRICULTURE, TOURISM, AND QUALITY OF LIFE

FINGER LAKES LAND TRUST **FLLT.ORG/TOP10**



"The Finger Lakes region hosts an incredible diversity of habitat for fish and wildlife. We must act now to ensure that we retain this diversity for future generations."

David Stilwell, Field Supervisor,
US Fish and Wildlife Service, New York Office

LANDS AND WATERS IN PERIL

TOXIC ALGAE

Increased nutrient runoff into the lakes is raising the risk of toxic algae outbreaks across the region. In part due to land use and changing weather patterns, these outbreaks threaten human health as well as the region's tourism economy.

DISAPPEARING LAKESHORE & PUBLIC ACCESS

Intensifying development pressure threatens the last remaining wild shoreline as well as key parcels that link existing conservation lands. Loss of undeveloped shoreline stresses the health of our lakes and precludes opportunities for public access.

SPRAWLING DEVELOPMENT

Population growth is localized within the region, but sprawling development is degrading the scenic character for which the region is famous. Poorly sited homes and commercial development are forever changing iconic vistas.

LOSS OF PRIME AGRICULTURAL LAND

The Finger Lakes region hosts some of New York's most productive farmlands, but farms are increasingly threatened by development—particularly those over-looking the lakes and close to major arterial roads such as Routes 5 & 20.

SKANEATELES LAKE. Photo: John Sutton. Cover: SKANEATELES LAKE. Photo: Bill Hecht. Design: Scarlet Duba, Duba Design

CALL TO ACTION

THE FINGER LAKES REGION

IS LIKE NO OTHER—ELEVEN SPARKLING LAKES SURROUNDED BY MAJESTIC WATERFALLS, RUGGED GORGES, ROLLING FORESTS, AND SCENIC FARMLANDS. RESIDENTS AND TRAVELERS DELIGHT IN OUTDOOR RECREATION, LOCAL FOODS, AND SMALL TOWN COMMUNITY LIFE. THIS IS FAMOUS NEW YORK WINE COUNTRY.

Here the lands and waters are the basis of the economy. Agriculture contributes more than a billion dollars to the local economy while tourism adds over $2 billion in annual revenue. The working landscape is as productive as it is beautiful. Yet today the region faces persistent and documented threats. Five of eleven Finger Lakes have suffered outbreaks of toxic algae amid declining water quality and increasing nutrient runoff. Scenic landscapes are yielding to sprawling development. Drinking water sources for over one million residents are left increasingly vulnerable as our last remaining undeveloped shoreline is threatened by development. The threats are real and intensifying.

BALD EAGLE. Photo: Bill Banaszewski

CANADICE LAKE, ONTARIO COUNTY. Photo: Bill Banaszewski

TO ENSURE THE FUTURE

OF OUR PRICELESS LANDS AND WATERS, WE MUST ACT NOW TO CONSERVE THESE RESOURCES BY INVESTING $100 MILLION OVER THE COURSE OF THE NEXT DECADE. THIS INVESTMENT WILL YIELD MANY BENEFITS—IN QUALITY OF LIFE AND THE REGION'S ECONOMIC VITALITY.

Opportunities for a Bright Future

It is a time of great opportunity. A surging artisan food and beverage movement reflects a nationwide revival of interest in local and sustainable farming. Agricultural tourism—expanding on the renown of Finger Lakes wines—is bringing new visitors to the region every year. Increased cooperation among landowners, land trusts, public conservation agencies, and private donors has resulted in major conservation successes in recent years. Finally, there is widespread agreement that the Finger Lakes region is a special place worth protecting in a time of change and growth.

The Finger Lakes Land Trust

The Finger Lakes Land Trust works across a 12-county region to protect critical habitat and water resources, keep prime farmland in agriculture, and connect conserved lands. With nearly 20,000 acres already protected, the Land Trust has partnered with public and private organizations, municipalities, and community members for over 27 years to thoughtfully advance land conservation. Today, we assert the need to address the region as a whole and accelerate our conservation efforts.

ROY H. PARK PRESERVE, TOMPKINS COUNTY. Photo: FLLT

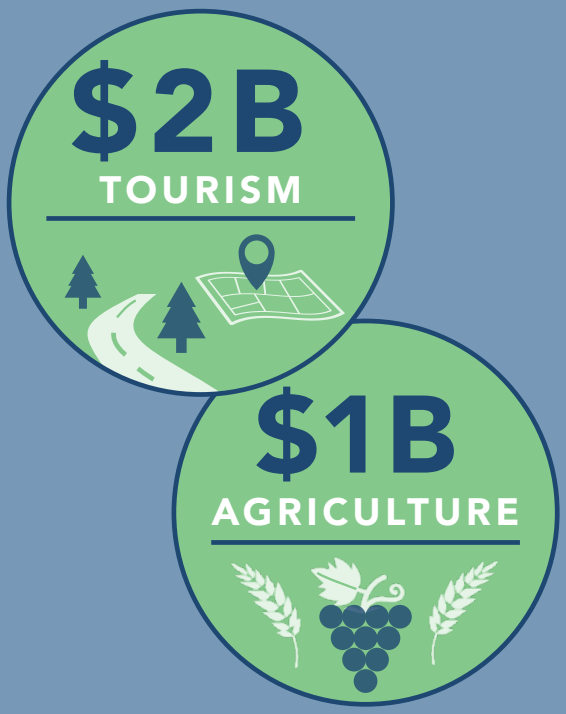
ELLIS HOLLOW NATURE PRESERVE, TOMPKINS COUNTY. Photo: Tom Reimers

Introducing 10 Conservation Strategies for the Region

The Finger Lakes Land Trust, in consultation with over 40 organizations, has identified 10 strategies for seizing timely opportunities, countering active threats, and securing lands and waters that sustain agriculture, tourism, and quality of life across the region. The strategies were developed through a review of natural resource inventories and conservation plans, coupled with outreach to public conservation agencies, planning departments, watershed groups, nonprofit organizations, academic institutions, and other stakeholders (see page 21). This agenda is the first of its kind for the 12-county region.

A Call for Collaboration

Implementing the strategies on a regional scale will call for substantial and sustained investment from both the public and private sectors. No single agency or organization can successfully carry out the strategies highlighted in this document. Implementation will require a collaborative approach involving many partners.



Agriculture contributes more than $1 billion dollars to the local economy while tourism adds over $2 billion in annual revenue.

TOP 10 CONSERVATION STRATEGIES

Priorities for land and water protection across the 12-county Finger Lakes region.

WE MUST ACT NOW.

KEUKA LAKE, YATES COUNTY. Photo: Bill Hecht

PROTECT OUR LAKES, STREAMS, & DRINKING WATER

Buffer Our Streams & Create New Wetlands

Create permanent streamside buffers on farms and other lands that directly affect water quality for towns and cities across the region. Support a systematic effort to restore and create wetlands to filter runoff and protect our waters while providing valuable wildlife habitat.

Save Our Last Undeveloped Shoreline Now

Protect our last wild shoreline through the acquisition of parks and conservation land as well as the use of conservation easements (perpetual legal agreements that limit development while keeping land in private ownership).

Protect the City of Syracuse Drinking Water Supply

Restore the successful program that used conservation easements to secure environmentally sensitive lands adjacent to Skaneateles Lake, the primary drinking water supply for Syracuse residents.

SAVE FARMS, WINERIES, & RURAL CHARACTER

Save Threatened Farms & Wineries

Preserve agricultural lands that are most threatened by development through increased funding for New York State's farmland protection program. Investment in this program will also spur economic development by aiding agricultural enterprises.

Protect Scenic Vistas & Designated Byways on Cayuga and Seneca Lakes

Inventory publicly accessible vista points across the region and lands bordering the Cayuga Lake and Seneca Lake Scenic Byways. Secure the highest quality vistas and lands through the acquisition of conservation easements.

Maintain Rural Character Through Stronger Land Use Planning

Strengthen locally-based land use planning by providing increased technical assistance to town planning boards and producing a region-specific guide to best practices for rural land use.

KEEP NATURE WILD & ENHANCE PUBLIC ACCESS

Create the Canandaigua Skyline Trail

Establish a corridor of conserved lands extending from the shores of Canandaigua Lake to the summit of Bare Hill and southward to the village of Naples—expanding the "nature nearby" opportunities for Rochester residents and visitors to the western Finger Lakes.

Complete Cayuga Lake's Emerald Necklace

Secure the Finger Lakes Trail and adjacent natural lands within an 80-mile arc of public open space surrounding the southern end of Cayuga Lake.

Create the Chemung River Greenbelt

Create a world-class assemblage of riverfront parks, conservation lands, and agricultural lands bordering the Chemung River between Corning and Elmira—providing a variety of recreational opportunities.

Save the South End of Skaneateles Lake

Create a ridge-to-ridge greenbelt that hosts a regional multiuse trail network and helps ensure water quality within Skaneateles Lake.

The 11 Finger Lakes provide drinking water for over one million people in the region.

HEMLOCK LAKE, LIVINGSTON COUNTY. Photo: Chuck Feil

PROTECT
OUR LAKES, STREAMS & DRINKING WATER

The eleven Finger Lakes are the lifeblood of the region. They provide drinking water for one million residents while attracting tourists from around the world. The lakes define local culture and traditions, creating bonds among families and communities that are cherished for a lifetime.

The lakes have long been known for their clean waters. In recent years, however, nutrient-laden runoff, exacerbated by a warming climate, has resulted in declining water quality. Five of eleven lakes reported significant outbreaks of toxic algae in 2015—resulting in health alerts warning against swimming and drinking the impacted water. Toxic algae can cause nausea; skin, eye, and throat irritation; and breathing difficulties. It is harmful for wildlife, pets, and humans.

Today, the stakes are high to save our remaining pristine lakeshore as development pressures increase. Soil erosion from farm fields and contamination from lakeshore septic systems both increase the likelihood of future toxic algal blooms. All 11 lakes are at risk. Let's save our lakes by aggressively countering these threats.

GOETCHIUS WETLAND PRESERVE, TOMPKINS COUNTY. Photo: Betsy Darlington

Buffer Our Streams and Create New Wetlands

In many areas, streams lack adequate buffers from adjacent crop lands and pastures, resulting in erosion and runoff of nutrient-laden soil, exacerbated by the increasing scale of agriculture and increasing intensity of the region's rain storms. Existing federal programs addressing this issue are not adequate. It is time to introduce a new program to purchase permanent conservation easements on sensitive streamside areas. These areas could then be restored to natural vegetation that would help reduce runoff to the lakes.

Additional funds should be made available to support a systematic effort to restore and create wetlands that can serve as "filter traps" in areas of significant runoff from farm fields and road ditches. By slowing rainwater runoff, wetlands allow nutrient-rich sediment to settle out and be taken up by wetland plants rather than running into our lakes.

Save Our Last Undeveloped Shoreline Now

Undeveloped shoreline is scarce in the Finger Lakes. On each lake, there remain pristine stretches of lakeshore that should be conserved. These wild shores need permanent protection to provide lasting conservation value and create rare opportunities for public access.

The relative lack of public access to the lakes has been cited again and again by residents and visitors as an issue to be addressed.

The purchase of conservation easements on private lands should also be pursued—particularly on large camp properties that have the potential to provide some degree of public access for recreation.

Photo: Chuck Feil

"We must act now to protect our crystal clear lake for the enjoyment of future generations and the thousands of people who drink its pure unfiltered water!"

—Paul Torrisi, President, Skaneateles Lake Association, Inc.

STAGHORN CLIFFS, ONONDAGA COUNTY. Photo: John Sutton

Protect the City of Syracuse Drinking Water Supply

Skaneateles Lake has long served as the primary drinking water supply for the City of Syracuse. It is also one of only two major public drinking water supplies in the state that are not filtered due to their exceptionally high quality (the other is the New York City supply).

Starting in 2005, the City of Syracuse implemented a systematic program to secure watershed lands through the acquisition of perpetual conservation easements on privately owned lands. More than 850 acres of farms, forests, and streamside habitat were secured through this program, which concluded in 2012.

Development pressures are steadily increasing within the Skaneateles Lake watershed, and it is time to resume the land protection program to keep the lake water clean. This will require a significant commitment from multiple public agencies as well as the private sector.

THREAT: TOXIC ALGAE

"The documented occurrence of harmful algal blooms in the Finger Lakes has been increasing. It is essential that we more intensively address land use and water management in an integrated fashion to reduce nutrient loadings into the Finger Lakes."

—Lisa Cleckner, PhD, MBA, Director, Finger Lakes Institute, Hobart and William Smith Colleges

RUNOFF INTO OWASCO LAKE. Photo: Bill Hecht

TOXIC ALGAE BLOOM IN OWASCO LAKE. Photo: Tim Schneider

The Finger Lakes region has been identified as among the top 20 most threatened farming regions in the United States.

American Farmland Trust, "Cultivate New York"

KEUKA LAKE, STEUBEN COUNTY. Photo: Chuck Feil

SAVE
FARMS, WINERIES, & RURAL CHARACTER

The Finger Lakes region is famous for sweeping expanses of farmland and picturesque lake views. Millions of tourists flock to the region to explore over 50 farmers markets, 3 wine trails, u-pick apple orchards, and emerging beer and cheese trails. Drawn by the lakes and agricultural tourism opportunities, visitors and residents alike are charmed by the rural character of our region.

Yet our agricultural land and iconic views are increasingly under threat. Farmers are challenged by the conversion of land for residential and commercial development—a particular concern for farms that rely on significant amounts of leased land.

We are calling for sustained investment to save the farmland and scenic vistas that are most imperiled by development. By increasing funding from public and private sources—and providing technical assistance to municipal planning boards—we can preserve our farms, vineyards, and rural character forever.

"Hundreds of visitors pass through our tasting room every week. Looking out over our vineyards, I'm not surprised this has been rated one of the most beautiful wine regions in the world."

—Marti Macinski, Owner, Standing Stone Vineyards, Seneca Lake

Photo: Kristian Reynolds

DRYDEN, TOMPKINS COUNTY. Photo: Marie Reed

NAPLES, ONTARIO COUNTY. Photo: Nigel Kent

Save Threatened Farms & Wineries

Agriculture is the economic mainstay of the Finger Lakes region, home to some of the most productive agricultural soils in the Northeast. Rich soils support a growing number of vineyards that are drawing international acclaim and tourists.

However, prime farmland is giving way to residential and commercial development. In northern Ontario County, for example, sprawling development along State Route 332 is displacing agriculture while degrading what was once a scenic gateway to the region. On Routes 5 and 20, prime farmland is giving way to a growing strip of commercial development.

To protect our best farms, a much greater investment in New York State's Farmland Protection Implementation Grant Program is needed. Without a substantially increased investment, our best farms and lakeside vineyards will likely give way to development.

Protect Scenic Vistas & Designated Byways on Cayuga and Seneca Lakes

The Finger Lakes region is known for its sweeping views and scenic vista points, many of which are located on state highways and rural country roads. Both the Cayuga Lake and Seneca Lake Scenic Byways are officially recognized by New York State. These roads, with their beautiful lake views, are traveled by tourists coming to the region for local wines, a small town experience, and lake vacations.

Unfortunately, with each passing year, scenic vistas are obscured by poorly planned development, altering the character of our rural roads and iconic viewsheds.

Given the size of the region, a systematic assessment is needed to inventory the most scenic vista points on well-traveled roads (including the two designated byways). Based on priorities identified in the inventory, a broad protection effort can begin to secure the most scenic sites using conservation easements.

Photo: Megan Fenton

"In Yates County alone, there are nine farmers who are ready to protect their prime agricultural land within the designated priority area. One of these farmers has been on the waitlist for state protection funds since 2006."

—Larry Lewis, Chair, Yates County Agriculture and Farmland Protection Board

WEST RIVER, YATES COUNTY. Photo: David Kotok

Maintain Rural Character Through Stronger Land Use Planning

Land use decisions in the Finger Lakes region are made primarily by volunteer planning boards that have limited professional support. More than 200 municipalities make land use decisions within the region.

As towns struggle to grow their tax base under difficult economic conditions, commercial development along major arterial roads is typically welcomed. In many cases, however, these town boards lack the technical resources for shaping development proposals that are compatible with the community's traditional character.

A locally based guide should be published to help municipal boards adopt best practices and consider alternative construction designs that maintain community character and provide for long-term resiliency in the face of climate change. A technical assistance program should be initiated in conjunction with the distribution of the guide throughout the 12-county region.

THREAT: SPRAWLING DEVELOPMENT

Sprawl is degrading the scenic character for which the Finger Lakes region is famous, threatening the last undeveloped shoreline and key parcels that link conservation lands.

CANANDAIGUA LAKESHORE DEVELOPMENT.

Encompassing an 80-mile stretch of the Finger Lakes Trail, the Emerald Necklace will ultimately link 50,000 acres of existing public conservation land.

FINGER LAKES NATIONAL FOREST, SCHUYLER COUNTY.
Photo: Joel Cisne

KEEP
NATURE WILD & ENHANCE PUBLIC ACCESS

The southern expanse of the Finger Lakes region features wild lands known for rugged gorges, rolling forests, sparkling waters, and diverse wildlife. Wide-ranging mammals including black bears and fishers roam the hills. Tourists and residents enjoy existing conservation lands where they find majestic waterfalls, panoramic lake views, and quiet hiking trails.

There are many places worthy of protection, but we believe that the greatest impact can be achieved by focusing conservation efforts on the south ends of Canandaigua Lake and Skaneateles Lake; the Emerald Necklace surrounding the south end of Cayuga Lake; and, a stretch of the Chemung River just east of Corning.

For each of these focus areas, the Land Trust aims to partner with a broad coalition of public and private stakeholders to knit together conservation corridors with an eye to protecting waterways, linking conserved lands, and building trails.

"I like nature and all of the animals and plants in it. The Finger Lakes Land Trust preserves habitat for them and gives me a place to explore and enjoy them."

—Henry, age 11, Cayuga County resident

Photo: provided

CANANDAIGUA LAKE, YATES COUNTY. Photo: Bill Banaszewski

BOCK-HARVEY FOREST PRESERVE, TOMPKINS COUNTY. Photo: Edie Jodz

Create the Canandaigua Skyline Trail

Canandaigua Lake—the "Chosen Spot"—is the birthplace of the Seneca Nation. The proposed Canandaigua Skyline Trail will link historic Seneca sites and provide visitors with breathtaking views of the lake.

The corridor of conserved lands will eventually extend along the east side of the lake from existing state land at Bare Hill to the Finger Lakes Trail in the village of Naples.

Public and private funds are needed for both land acquisition and trail development. Once complete, the Canandaigua Skyline Trail will provide Rochester residents with close-to-home outdoor experiences that will rival what they can experience in one of our national parks.

Complete Cayuga Lake's Emerald Necklace

Now ten years in the making, the Emerald Necklace stretches from the Finger Lakes National Forest in the west to Hammond Hill and Yellow Barn State Forests in the east. Encompassing a 80-mile stretch of the Finger Lakes Trail, the Emerald Necklace will ultimately link 50,000 acres of existing public conservation land.

This landscape features New York's only national forest, largest wildlife management area, two important bird areas, and extensive recreational trail networks. The Emerald Necklace hosts the headwaters of numerous streams that provide clean water to the Finger Lakes and Susquehanna River watersheds.

Strategic acquisitions and thoughtful use of conservation easements will ensure future connectivity between these lands—good for people who love outdoor recreation and animals seeking migration corridors.

CLIMATE RESILIENCY

CHEMUNG RIVER AND PALISADES, CHEMUNG COUNTY. Photo: FLLT

CARPENTER'S FALLS, CAYUGA COUNTY. Photo: Bill Hecht

Create the Chemung River Greenbelt

A 6-mile stretch of the Chemung River between Corning and Elmira is remarkably wild, given its proximity to these small cities. Bald eagles soar over the river while black bears prowl its banks. A growing number of paddlers, hikers, birdwatchers, and anglers may be found along this scenic stretch of river.

Given this area's proximity to population centers and the developing Interstate 86 corridor, lands along the river are increasingly threatened. Conservation efforts here will build upon an existing network of public boat launches, non-profit nature preserves, a county park, and town-owned conservation lands.

Funds are needed to secure lands adjacent to the river, establish trail connections between existing conserved lands, and provide for enhanced public access and recreational opportunities.

Save the South End of Skaneateles Lake

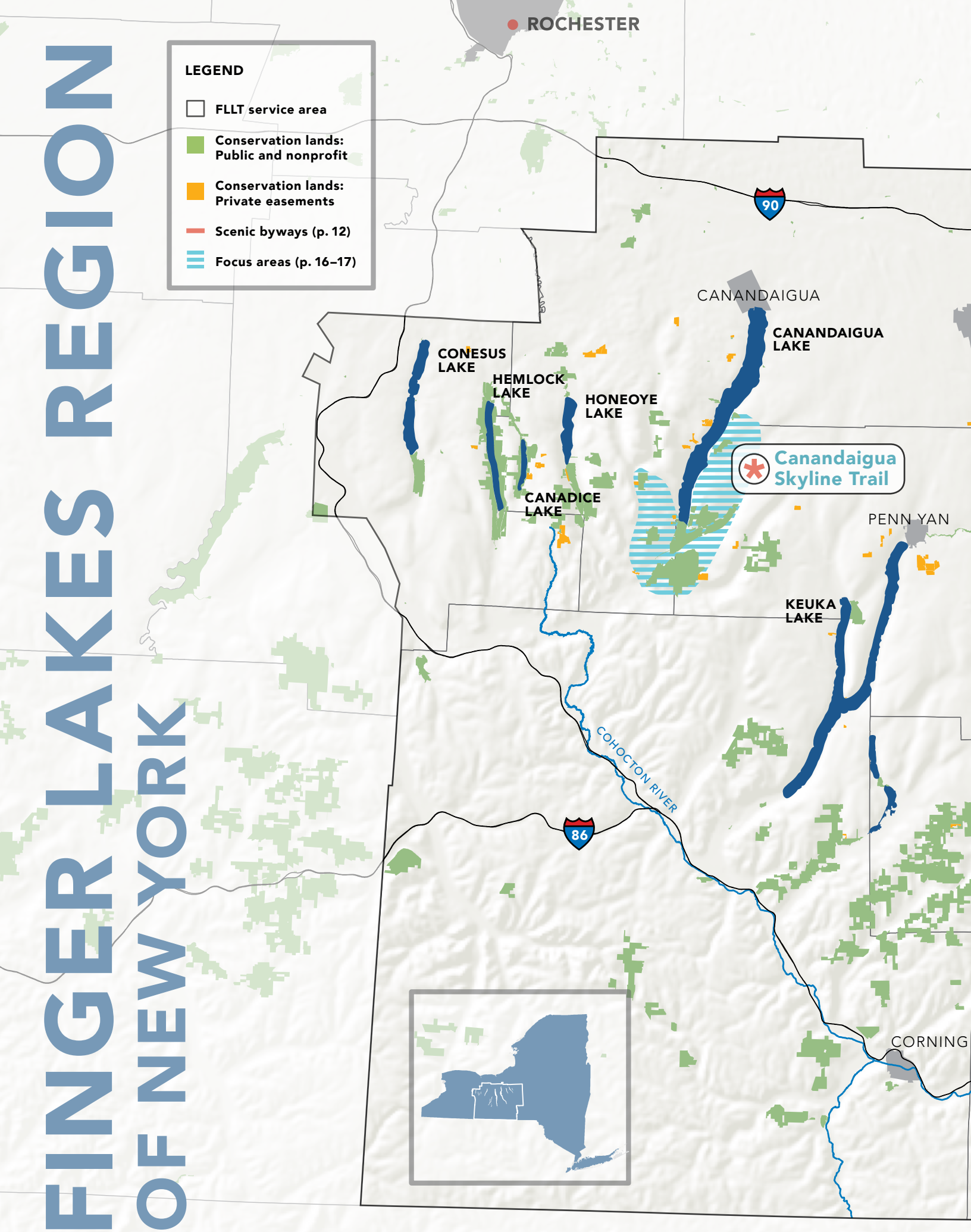
The south end of Skaneateles Lake is the most pristine end of what many believe is the most pristine of all the Finger Lakes. Forested hillsides drop steeply to lakeside cliffs that reveal extraordinary fossil formations. Wetlands harbor rare flora and a remarkable diversity of birds. Conserved lands include the wilds of Bear Swamp State Forest, Carpenter's Falls, and several conservation areas owned and managed by the Finger Lakes Land Trust.

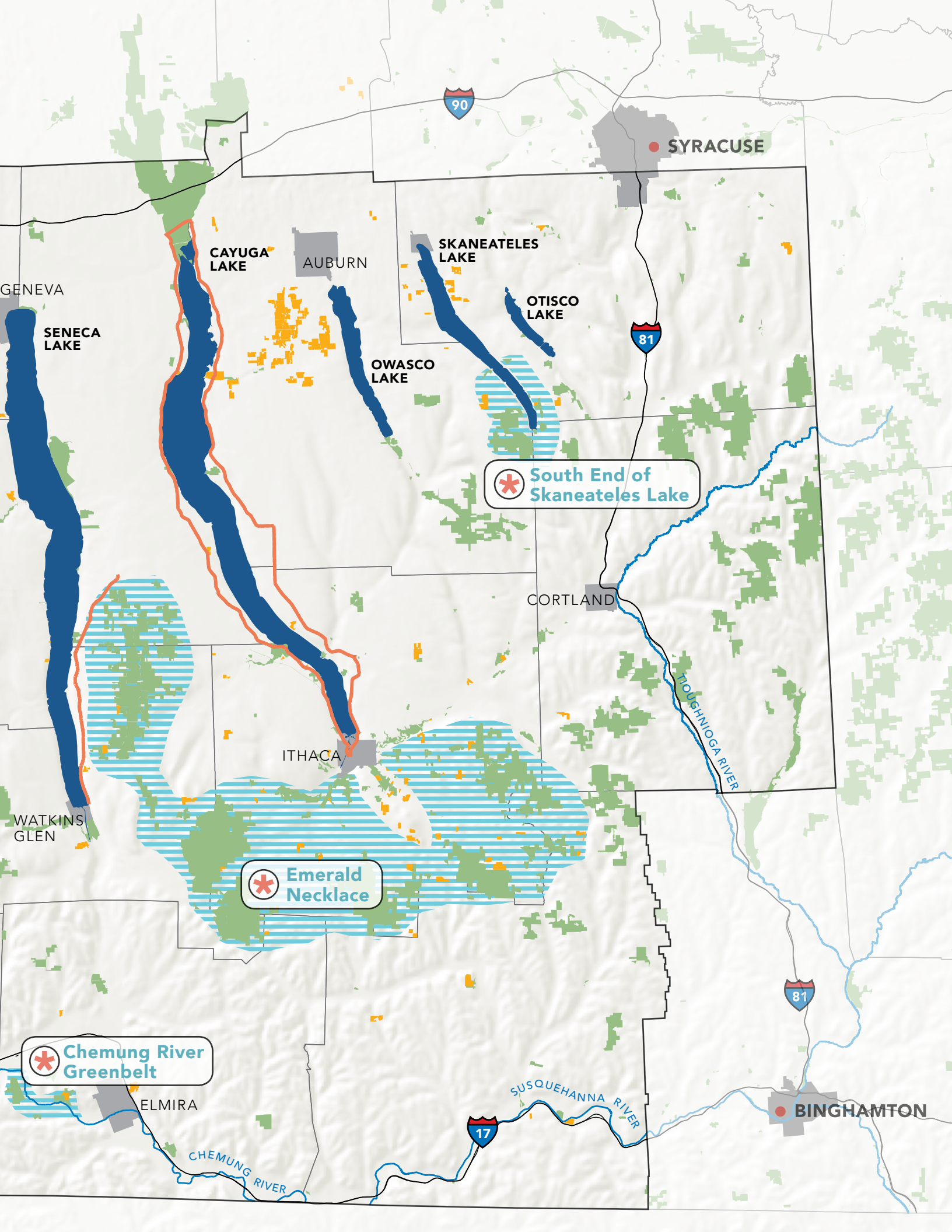
Creating a corridor of conserved land linking these areas will protect the lake's water quality and offer an opportunity to build a world-class network of trails that will be used by residents and visitors alike.

By creating networks of linked conservation lands, we can help ensure the continued sustainability of plant and animal populations that are challenged by our changing climate.

BOBCAT. Photo: Bill Banaszewski. GIRL WITH RED NEWT. Photo: Rick Lightbody. NORTHERN SHRIKE. Photo: Marie Read

FINGER LAKES REGION OF NEW YORK




90
SYRACUSE
CAYUGA LAKE
AUBURN
SKANEATELES LAKE
GENEVA
OTISCO LAKE
SENECA LAKE
81
OWASCO LAKE
South End of Skaneateles Lake
CORTLAND
TIOUGHNIOGA RIVER
ITHACA
WATKINS GLEN
Emerald Necklace
81
Chemung River Greenbelt
ELMIRA
SUSQUEHANNA RIVER
BINGHAMTON
17
CHEMUNG RIVER

HOW YOU CAN HELP

WE MUST ACT NOW BY INVESTING $100 MILLION

over the next decade to secure the green infrastructure needed to support the region's economy and its quality of life.

LITTLE HIKER. Photo: Christopher Ray

DISCOVER

Learn about our land protection strategies and how we invest in conservation

fllt.org/top10

GIVE

Make your gift and join the Land Trust

fllt.org/give

VOLUNTEER

Help the Land Trust maintain conserved lands and promote regional conservation

fllt.org/volunteer

CONTACT

Finger Lakes Land Trust / 202 E Court Street, Ithaca, NY 14850 / 607-275-9487 / fllt.org

We residents of the Finger Lakes are blessed to have the Land Trust working for us. The land is worth fighting for—and the Finger Lakes Land Trust is working diligently to save the lands and waters for generations to come.

—Ellen Polimeni, Mayor, City of Canandaigua, and Member, Finger Lakes Land Trust

ABOUT THE FINGER LAKES LAND TRUST

The Finger Lakes Land Trust is a nonprofit conservation organization that works across a 12-county region in Central New York. Through 2016, we have worked cooperatively with landowners to permanently protect nearly 20,000 acres of the region's scenic farmlands and treasured natural areas. We own and manage more than 35 conservation areas that are open to the public for recreation. The Land Trust holds over 120 easements on protected lands that remain in private ownership on local tax rolls. Additionally we have saved lands through partnerships with government and local nonprofit organizations. Learn more at fllt.org/about.

CONSULTED PARTNERS

We thank representatives of the following agencies and institutions for providing valuable input for this report. COUNTY PLANNING AGENCIES: Cayuga, Chemung, Cortland, Livingston, Onondaga, Ontario, Schuyler, Seneca, Steuben, Tioga, Tompkins, Yates. REGIONAL PLANNING BOARDS: Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board, Genesee/Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council, Southern Tier Central Regional Planning and Development Board, Southern Tier East Regional Planning Development Board. NEW YORK STATE: New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation; New York Natural Heritage Program; Department of Environmental Conservation Regions 7 and 8. FEDERAL GOVERNMENT: US Fish & Wildlife Service, New York State Office. NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS: The Nature Conservancy, American Farmland Trust, Finger Lakes Institute, Wetlands Trust, Finger Lakes Trail Conference, Genessee Valley Conservancy, Central New York Land Trust. WATERSHED GROUPS: Finger Lakes-Lake Ontario Water Protection Alliance, Otisco Lake Preservation Association, Owasco Watershed Lake Association, Skaneateles Lake Association, Cayuga Lake Watershed Network, Seneca Lake Pure Waters Association, Keuka Lake Association, Canandaigua Lake Watershed Association, Canandaigua Lake Watershed Council, Honeoye Valley Association, Conesus Lake Watershed Council.

The Finger Lakes Land Trust is grateful to have received funding for this report from New York's Environmental Protection Fund and the New York State Conservation Partnership Program, administered by the Land Trust Alliance. Additional funding came from membership of the Finger Lakes Land Trust.

Please Recycle

TO CONSERVE FOREVER THE LANDS AND WATERS OF THE FINGER LAKES REGION, ENSURING SCENIC VISTAS, LOCAL FOODS, CLEAN WATER, AND WILD PLACES FOR EVERYONE.

FINGER LAKES LAND TRUST

Incorporated 1989

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